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SUBJECT: SOUTH KOREAN PRESIDENT PLANS VISIT TO AUSTRALIA

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR JAMES F. COLE. REASON: 1.4 (C) and (D)

¶1. (C/NF) Summary: DFAT North Asia Division North East Asia Branch Assistant Secretary Daniel Sloper told Poloff on February 5 that ROK Foreign Minister Yu Myung-hwan,s meetings in Perth and Sydney January 22-24 were to finalize arrangements for President Lee Myung-Bak,s visit to Australia during the first week of March. Sloper said that during the President's visit the two governments hope to announce the inauguration of formal negotiations for an FTA and to agree to an Enhanced Security Cooperation framework. The enhanced defense cooperation would include a defense information exchange agreement, materials testing and evaluation cooperation, aid coordination, humanitarian relief assistance coordination and cooperation at the Australian Civil-Military Center. During Mr. Yu,s one and a half hour meeting with Stephen Smith, the two Foreign Ministers discussed China, the DPRK, the global financial crisis, Japan, Fiji, APC, ASEAN and the EAS. End summary.

PRESIDENT LEE MYUNG BAK'S VISIT TO SIGNAL ENHANCED DEFENSE COOPERATION

¶2. (C/NF) Sloper said that Lee Myung-bak's visit will build on Prime Minister Rudd's trip to Seoul last August. According to Sloper, the enhanced defense cooperation framework will be very similar to that which Australia has with Japan. Sloper said that the exact date for President Lee's visit was not yet fixed. The enhanced defense cooperation would include a defense information exchange agreement, materials testing and evaluation cooperation, aid coordination, humanitarian relief assistance coordination and cooperation at the recently-opened Australian Civil-Military Center. Sloper noted that the program would operate at the working level, though both countries are contemplating an annual minister-level review.

FTA NEGOTIATIONS ANNOUNCEMENT

¶3. (C/NF) Sloper said that during the President's visit the two governments hope to announce the inauguration of formal negotiations for an FTA. Sloper expressed optimism over prospects for the Australia-South Korea FTA negotiations. He said that the ROK government will have a more delicate situation in selling an agreement to the Korean public, citing agriculture as one potentially contentious sector. During Mr. Yu,s one and a half hour meeting with Stephen Smith, the two Foreign Ministers discussed China, DPRK, the global financial crisis, Japan, Fiji, APC, ASEAN and the EAS. On Fiji, Sloper said that Smith wanted the ROK, through its national carrier Korean Air, to apply travel restrictions on members of the Fiji government in line with what Australia and others are doing. According to Sloper, the two foreign Ministers also discussed the new administration in Washington and, specifically, the need to keep the United States engaged in the Asia Pacific region. He noted that both were in

"general agreement" on this latter issue.

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